DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 117 811 EA 007 867

AUTHOR Kingston, Albert J.; Gentry, Harold W.
TITLE Discipline Problems: Then and Now.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Corporal Punishment; Discipline; Discipline Policy; *Discipline Problems; *School Surveys; *Secondary Education; State Surveys; *Student Behavior; *Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS *Georgia

ABSTRACT

This paper compares data collected in a 1974 survey of discipline problems in Georgia secondary schools with data from a similar survey conducted by the same investigators in 1961. The 1961 survey examined 20 types of student misbehavior that had been identified in earlier studies; the 1974 survey included those 20 plus 13 additional items. The revised survey questionnaire was sent to the principals of 341 Georgia secondary schools during the spring of 1974, and a total of 266 (78 percent) responded. This compared to an 81 percent response rate in 1961. Although there were some definite differences between data from the two surveys, the most common types of student misbehavior in 1961 were also the most common in 1974. Included in the paper are a number of data tables that summarize responses to both surveys and facilitate comparisons between them. (JG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED117811

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Discipline Problems: Then and Now

Albert J. Kingston and Harold W. Gentry
The University of Georgia

In 1961 the authors conducted a survey of discipline problems encounted in the secondary schools of Georgia. (Kingston and Gentry 1961). The instrument employed was based upon eighteen types of misbehavior identified by the National Education Association in a survey of teacher opinion concerning student behavior (1956). Two additional items which Henning (1949) had found to be significant were incorporated in the survey instrument.

In the late spring of 1974, the survey was repeated. For this purpose, the original survey instrument was modified by the addition of three items dealing with problems that had been reported by some educators. These items were (1) selling narcotics, (2) the possession of narcotics, and (3) mugging - taking valuables from other students. Ten additional questions concerning incidents which have been frequently reported in secondary schools also were added to the new survey.

The revised questionnaire was sent to the principals of 341 secondary schools in Georgia during the spring of 1974. Follow-up letters were sent to those who had not responded three weeks later. Of the 341 schools receiving the questionnaire, a total of 266, or 78 percent, responded. In the 1961 survey, responses were obtained from principals of 288 white and 132 Negro secondary schools, for a total of 420. The total number represented 81 percent of all high schools in the state at that time. Because Georgia high schools are now integrated, the racial dimension was not employed in analyzing the 1974 data.

Results

Common Misbehaviors

As shown in Table I, the most common types of student misbehaviors in 1961 were also the most common in 1974. For example, "Failure to do homework and other assignments", which was the most common type of misbehavior in 1961, ranked second in the most recent survey. This misbehavior was reported as being common by 66.7 percent of the principals in 1961 and by approximately 70 percent in 1974. "Truancy" ranked as the third most common type of misbehavior in 1961, was ranked number one in 1974. In 1961, this misbehavior was reported by 33.8 percent of secondary school administrators, in 1974 it was reported by 81.2 percent of all respondents. Overall, student behavior seems to mirror the zeitgeist of our time. "Impertinence", "use of profanity", "destruction of school property", "stealing", "obscene scribbling", and "lying" showed a considerable increase in incidence from 1961 to 1974.

Although the frequency with which misbehavior occurred increased in the period between the two surveys, these data seem to indicate that school administrators and teachers do not work in an environment where they must fear for their physical safety. Only one principal reported that "physical violence against teachers and administrators" was a common misbehavior in 1974. In contrast, three respondents indicated that this was a common misbehavior in 1961.

EA 007 867

In 1961 no principal reported that "using narcotics" was a common problem; in 1974, 24.4 percent reported this type of conduct was common. While no response to "selling narcotics" and "possession of narcotics" was requested in the earlier study, 11.3 percent of the principals reported that "selling of narcotics" was a common problem in 1974. In the same year, 12.8 percent indicated that "possession of narcotics" was a common misbehavior. The percentage of principals reporting "drinking intoxicants" as a common misbehavior increased from less than 1 percent in 1961 to 15 percent in 1974.

Most Disruptive to Educational Program

Proceeding on the assumption that some misbehaviors could be rather common but not be unduly disruptive of the educational program of a school, the secondary school principals were asked to identify one misbehavior which they considered to be most serious in terms of program disruption. The most serious misbehavior was "impertinence and discourtesy to teachers and administrators", as it was identified by 76, or 28.5 percent, of the respondents. "Truancy" was a close second choice, being selected by 70, or 26.3 percent, of the principals. The third and fourth ranking items were "failure to do homework and other assignments" and "using narcotics". Such commonly reported misbehavior as "smoking in school buildings or on school ground", "using profane or obscene language", "drinking intoxicants" and "obscene scribbling in lavatories and halls" were apparently not viewed as problems of a serious and disruptive nature. These data are presented in Table 2.

The overriding impression gained from the data presented in Tables 1 and 2 is that the most common misbehaviors in the public secondary schools of Georgia are related to a disinterest in academic endeavors. This apathy toward learning is then apparently expressed by many students by impertinent conduct and discourtesy to teachers. The increasing use of drugs and alcohol could probably be viewed as an attempt to escape an environment which holds little or no interest. On the other hand, it may simply reflect the national problem of drug and alcohol addiction among school-age youths.

Time Devoted to Discipline

Another concern of the study was to identify the percentage of working time devoted to student discipline by secondary principals. Data related to this subject are presented in Table 3. Analysis of these data shows that the secondary principal currently spends more time with disciplinary activities than he did at the beginning of the decade of the sixties. In 1961, some 56 percent of the principals devoted from 6 to 50 percent of their time to discipline; in the 1974, 68 percent of the principals reported they devoted as much of their time to this function.

In written comments on the questionnaire, a number of principals reported that assistant principals carried primary responsibility for discipline. The assumption of a greater responsibility for discipline by assistant principals probably resulted from elimination of the dual school system in the state. In the reorganization of schools that accompanied desegregation, many school districts retained former black and white principals in this capacity.

Activities Where Discipline Problems Frequently Develop

Where are discipline problems most likely to develop in the secondary school Information concerning this question, is presented in Table 4. In 1961, the most likely areas were school transportation, non-school activities, regular classroom activities, and school sponsored social events. Currently, problems most frequently occur in hallways, classrooms, on school grounds, and in connection with transportation. This latter finding seems to correlate with the fact that the most disruptive behavior in the schools is "impertinence and discourtesy to school personnel". Supervision of students in these areas involves close and continuing contact between teachers and students and thus provide ample opportunity for problems to arise. It may also be worthy to note that the secondary schools of Georgia are much larger than they were a decade ago. In this connection, the literature of the social sciences provides substantial evidence of the increased complexity of management, and of the greater possibility of alienation of personnel, as an organization increases in size. In the educational setting, various studies have shown that students in large high schools, as compared with students in small high schools, are less likely to identify with the school or to participate in various school activities. The failure to identify with the school, and to participate in its activities, may be the root cause of disciplinary problems.

It is interesting to note that "interschool athletics" and "school sponsored social events" are not so likely to spawn disciplinary problems as they did a decade ago. Why this is true, is not evident. As conjecture, however, it seems safe to suggest that athletic events do not produce as many discipline problems as formerly because they are intensively supervised by school officials and the police. The knowledge that such activities could easily be terminated may also play a part in suppressing disciplinary problems. It is also possible that students are more genuinely interested in athletics than in many other school activities. The fact that discipline problems do not arise as frequently in connection with school sponsored social events as formerly could result from the reduction in the number of these events since desegregation. Also, when they are held, they are usually closely supervised by parents, school officials, and police agencies.

Frequency of Occurrence by Grade Level

The respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate the grade level where behavior problems arise most frequently. These data are presented in Table 5. An examination of these data shows that behavior problems occurred most frequently in the lower grades (10th, 9th, 8th) of public high schools and that the pattern of response varied little from 1961 to 1974. The comparatively low incidence of behavior problems at the 11th and 12th grade levels may be an indication that students who were disciplinary problems in the lower grades have matured and no longer cause difficulties. On the other hand, it may reflect the high dropout rate in the public secondary schools of Georgia. By the time many disruptive students are old enough to be in these grades, they are also of the age when they may legally leave school.

There was a greater response to the "other" category in 1974 than in 1961. Basically, the written comments received suggested that disciplinary problems were rather evenly distributed across the various grade levels.

Method of Discipline

As shown by the data in Table 6, the methods of discipline most commonly employed by secondary school principals changed noticeably from 1961 to 1974. There was a considerable decrease in the use of "extra assignments" and "restriction from extra curricular activities" as means of disciplining students. Approximately 66 percent of the respondents reported using "extra assignments" as disciplinary tools in 1961, as compared with some 23 percent in 1974. The frequency of use of "restriction from extra curricular activities" dropped from 63.8 percent in the earlier period to a current 18.8 percent.

Georgia appears to be more traditional than many states with respect to the use of corporal punishment. While the percentage of schools using corporal punishment declined some 10 percent over the past decade, 60 percent of the respondents indicated it was a method of discipline currently employed. It should be noted that the use of this form of punishment is sanctioned by state law. State statutes also provide that teachers and administrators may not be liable in criminal or civil actions for the administration of corporal punishment if the punishment is administered in good faith and is not excessive or unduly severe. The punishment must be administered in the presence of another principal or teacher.

Almost 25 percent of the respondents reported the use of "expulsion" as a method of discipline. A comparable number indicated the use of "within school suspensions". A rather sharp drop in the use of "notification of parents" was very interesting. While this may reflect a feeling on the part of school personnel that notifying parents has less value than in earlier years, it may also reflect the difficulty of notifying parents of disciplinary actions in large school districts where school children are transported out of their local communities in response to court orders related to the desegration process.

Who Administers Corporal Punishment

If corporal punishment is employed as a method of discipline, someone must be responsible for its administration. Data related to this concern are presented in Table 7. An examination of this data indicates that principals still accept the major responsibility for this form of discipline, although the percentage involved dropped from 97.5 in 1961 to a current 90.6 percent. Slightly more than one-half of classroom teachers administer corporal punishment, a considerable reduction from the approximately 62 percent that were reported to be administering this form of punishment in 1961. With the exception of principals, assistant principals were more frequently involved in the administration of corporal punishment than other school personnel. Coaches were reported to be involved in 42, or 26 percent of the schools reporting. Counselors administered corporal punishment in only 5 percent of the schools, a figure which represents no appreciable change from 1961.

School Disruption - Selected Incidents

During the decade of the sixties "student rights" became a major subject of litigation before the courts of the land. There was a constant barrage of cases where students maintained that their constitutional rights were being abridged by school rules and the actions of school authorities. The survey instrument

requested secondary school principals to indicate the frequency with which selected incidents, that were frequently litigated on a nationwide basis, caused disruption in their schools (Item 1-9, Table 8). Additionally, the respondants were asked to indicate how frequently their school was distrubed by bomb warning (Item 10, Table 8).

Table 8 presents data related to the above concerns. An examination of this information indicates that the larger number of what may be termed "student-right incidents" did not occur very frequently in the secondary schools of Georgia. "Inappropriate student dress" seemed to be the most troublesome type of incident, having been reported as "occasionally" causing school disruption by 73 percent of the responding school principals. The "wearing of long hair" was the second most frequently occurring incident, being reported as "occasional" causing disruption by 31.95 percent of respondents.

With respect to bomb warning, 52.26 percent of the responding principals reported that their school was "occasionally" disrupted by warnings that bombs had been placed in their building(s). Less than 1 percent indicated that such warnings were frequent.

We have no evidence to indicate whether the frequency of occurrance of "student-rights incidents" was less in Georgia schools than in those of other states during the period under consideration. There were factors operating at the time, however, which could have exerted pressure to keep the number of such instances low. First, the public schools of Georgia, as a result of the desegregation process, underwent drastic changes during the 1960's. (e.g., At the time of the 1961 survey there were 515 high schools in the state, at the time of the current study there were only 341.) As a result of this change, school authorities may have become more aware of and concerned with individual rights, therefore they were often willing to modify school rules where they appeared to conflict with legitimate student rights. Second, where conflict did arise over student rights, there seemed to be a disposition on the part of state and federal courts to uphold school rules and regulations unless there was an evident violation of constitutional rights involved in the controversy. Third, it may be that Georgia secondary students, for the most part drawn from conservative backgrounds, did not see the "student-rights incidents" as appropriate issues and thereby avoided conflict with school authorities. Fourth, by the time this survey was initiated the high water mark of such incidents may have passed, and the school year of 1973-74 may have seen a turn to other pursuits.

The frequency of bomb warning seems to be a carry over from the early days of school desegregation, when such threats were found to be very disruptive of the school program. While no longer related to a protest against school desegregation, they nevertheless remain an effective means by which the operation of a school may be momentarily disrupted.

References

Henning, Carol J., "Discipline: Are School Practices Changing?" Clearing House, 23: 266-273, January, 1949.

Kingston, Albert J. and Harold W. Gentry, "Discipline Problems and Practice in the Secondary Schools of a Southern State", Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals. 45: 34-44, November, 1961.

Table I.

Most Common Types of Student Misbehaviors

Misbehaviors	1961 N=420 Rank	No.	Percent	1974 N=266 Rank	No	Perc
1. Impertinence and discourtesy to teachers and administrators	5	94	22.4	3	161	60.
2. Failure to do homework and other assignments	1	280	66.7	2	186	69.
3. Cheating on homework	6	85	20.2	15	42	15.8
4. Cheating on tests	7	76	18.1	13	51	19.1
5. Physical violence against teachers and administrators	19	3	.7	21	1	.4
6. Using profane or obscene language	11	21	5.0	4	147	55.
7. Truancy	3	142	33.8	1	216	81.
8. Destruction of school property	8	72	17.1	9	105	39.5
9. Smoking in school buildings or on school grounds	4	129	30.7	5	144	54.
10. Using narcotics	21	0	0	11	65	24.
11. Selling narcotics		N/A	N/A		30	11.
12. Possession of narcotics		N/A	N/A		34	12.8
13. Drinking intoxicants	17.5	4	.9	16	40	15.0
14. Mugging - taking valuables from other students		N/A	N/A		19	7.
15. Gang fighting	20	1	.2	19.5	3	1.1
16. Carrying switchblade knives, guns, etc.	16	9	2.1	18	8	3.
17. Unorganized fighting	15	12	2.8	14	48	18.
18. Congregating in halls and lavatories	2	173	41.2	8	106	39.8
19. Sex offenses	17.5	4	.9	19.5	3	1.
20. Stealing valuable items (automobiles, money, etc.)	13	17	4.0	12	60	22.
21. Stealing small items (pencils, books, etc.)	9	60	14.1	6	142	53.
22. Lying of a serious nature	12	19	4.5	10	69	25.
23. Obscene scribbling in lavatories, halls, etc.	10	52	12.4	7	110	41.
24. Other	14	14	3.3	17	19	7.

Table 2

Types of Student Misbehaviors Considered by Principals to be Most Serious in Terms of Disruption of the Educational Program

	Misbehaviors	1974* N=266	
		No.	Percent
1.	Impertinence and discourtesy to teachers and administrators	76	28.57
2.	Failure to do homework and other assignments	48	18.04
3.	Cheating on homework	0	0
4.	Cheating on tests	2	.75
5.	Physical violence against teachers and administrators	0	0
6.	Using profane or obscene language	5	1.88
7.	Truancy	70	26.31
8.	Destruction of school property	5	1.88
9.	Smoking in school buildings or on school grounds	4	1.50
10.	Using narcotics	12	4.51
11.	Selling narcotics	2	.75
12.	Possession of narcotics	0	0
13.	Drinking intoxicants	0	0
14.	Mugging - taking valuables from other students	0	0
15.	Gang fighting	0	0
16.	Carrying switchblade knives, guns, etc.	0	0
17.	Unorganized fighting	1	.37
18.	Congregating in halls and lavatories	9	3.38
19.	Sex offenses	0	0
20.	Stealing valuable items (automobiles, money, etc.)	3	1.13
21.	Stealing small items (pencils, books, etc.)	6	2.25
22.	Lying of a serious nature	0	0
23.	Obscene scribbling in lavatories, halls, etc.	0	0
24.	Other	23	8.66

*This information was not requested in 1960-61.

Table 3

Percent of Time Devoted to Discipline by Secondary School Principals

Percent of Time	1961 N=420		1974 N=266	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than .05	170	40.47	48	18.05
.06 - .25	207	49.28	132	49.62
.26 - .50	28	6.66	49	18.42
.51 - .75	5	1.19	26	9.77
.76 - .95	1	.23	4	1.50
.95 or more	0	0	N/A	N/A
No Response	9	2.14	7	2.63

Table 4

Activities Where Discipline Problems are Most Likely to Develop

Activity	1961 N=420		1974 N=266	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1. Interschool Athletics	111	26.42	19	7.14
2. Interschool Non-athletic Events	31	7.38	8	3.01
3. School Sponsored Social Events	127	30.23	30	11.28
4. Classroom Activities (Regular classes)	198	47.14	113	42.48
5. Physical Education Classes	N/A	N/A	43	16.17
6. Cafeteria	43	10.23	42	15.79
7. School Trips	64	15.23	14	5.26
8. Hallways - Before and After Schools, During change of classes	N/A	N/A	148	55.64
9. School Grounds	N/A	N/A	89	33.46
10. School Transportation	263	62.61	88	33.08
11. Non-School Activities	204	48.57	12	4.51
12. Other	21	5.00	10	3.76

Table 5

Grade Level Where Behavior Problems Arise Most Frequently

Grade Level	1961 N=420		1974 N=266	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Twelfth	27	6.42	3	1.13
Eleventh	27	6.42	5	1.88
Tenth	90	21.42	54	20.30
Ninth	264	62.85	88	33.08
Eighth	* N/A	N/A	57	21.43
Other	12	2.85	57	21.43
No Response	0	0	2	.75

*The eighth grade was not included in the 1961 survey.

Table 6

Methods of Discipline Most Commonly Employed

Method	1961 N=420		1974 N=266	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Extra assignments	277	65.95	61	22.92
Detention after School Hours	217	51.66	122	45.86
Suspension	355	84.52	215	80.83
Expulsion	N/A	N/A	56	21.05
Corporal Punishment	295	70.23	160	60.15
Restriction from Extra Curricular Activities	268	63.80	50	18.80
Notification of Parents	399	95.00	192	72.18
Within-school Suspension	N/A	N/A	57	21.43
Other	28	6.66	9	3.38

Table 7

Personnel Who Administer Corporal Punishment

Personnel	1961 N=327		1974 N=160	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Classroom Teachers	202	61.77	81	50.62
Counselors	14	4.28	8	5.00
Principal	319	97.55	145	90.62
Assistant Principals	N/A	N/A	123	76.87
Coaches	N/A	N/A	42	26.25
Other	4	1.22	4	2.50

Table 8

Frequency of School Disruption as Result of Selected Incidents

Incident	Response N=266							
	Never		Occasionally		Frequently		No Response	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
1. Refusal to salute the flag or pledge allegiance	227	85.34	38	14.29	0	0	1	.37
2. Wearing of protest symbols such as armbands, buttons, shoulder patches, etc.	236	88.72	29	10.90	0	0	1	.37
3. Publication of unauthorized student newspapers	251	94.36	14	5.26	0	0	1	.37
4. Inappropriate student dress (e.g. See-through blouses, tank shirts, short-shorts, etc.)	51	19.17	193	72.56	21	7.89	1	.37
5. Wearing of long hair	158	59.40	85	31.95	22	8.26	1	.37
6. Wearing of beards	188	70.68	72	27.07	5	1.88	1	.37
7. Wearing of mustaches	198	74.44	60	22.56	7	2.63	1	.37
8. Sit-in demonstrations on school property	238	89.47	27	10.15	0	0	1	.37
9. Distribution of unauthorized literature on campus	221	83.08	44	16.54	0	0	1	.37
10. Warning that bombs have been placed in school building	124	46.62	139	52.26	2	.75	1	.37